

Pole Creek Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 24,509 acres

The Pole Creek WSA (ID-111-18) is located in Owyhee County about 80 miles south of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 24,509 acres of BLM land and six privately owned inholdings totaling 240 acres (see Table 1).

The WSA is bounded on the north by the improved Deep Creek Road. Most of the remainder of the WSA is bordered by primitive dirt roads. Three cherry-stem roads (2.5 miles) enter the area.

The WSA has a wide diversity of topographic features including several shallow basalt-rimmed basins, juniper-covered hills and flat tablelands. Sagebrush communities dominate basins and plateaus while western juniper covers the hills, canyons and basalt rimrocks. Fifteen miles of perennial creeks wind through the canyons.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Management Framework Plan (MFP) for the Bruneau Resource Area finalized in March 1983. The recommendation for wilderness generated through the planning process was evaluated in the Jacks Creek Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in July 1989. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative where the entire 24,509 acre WSA would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

**0 acres recommended for
wilderness**

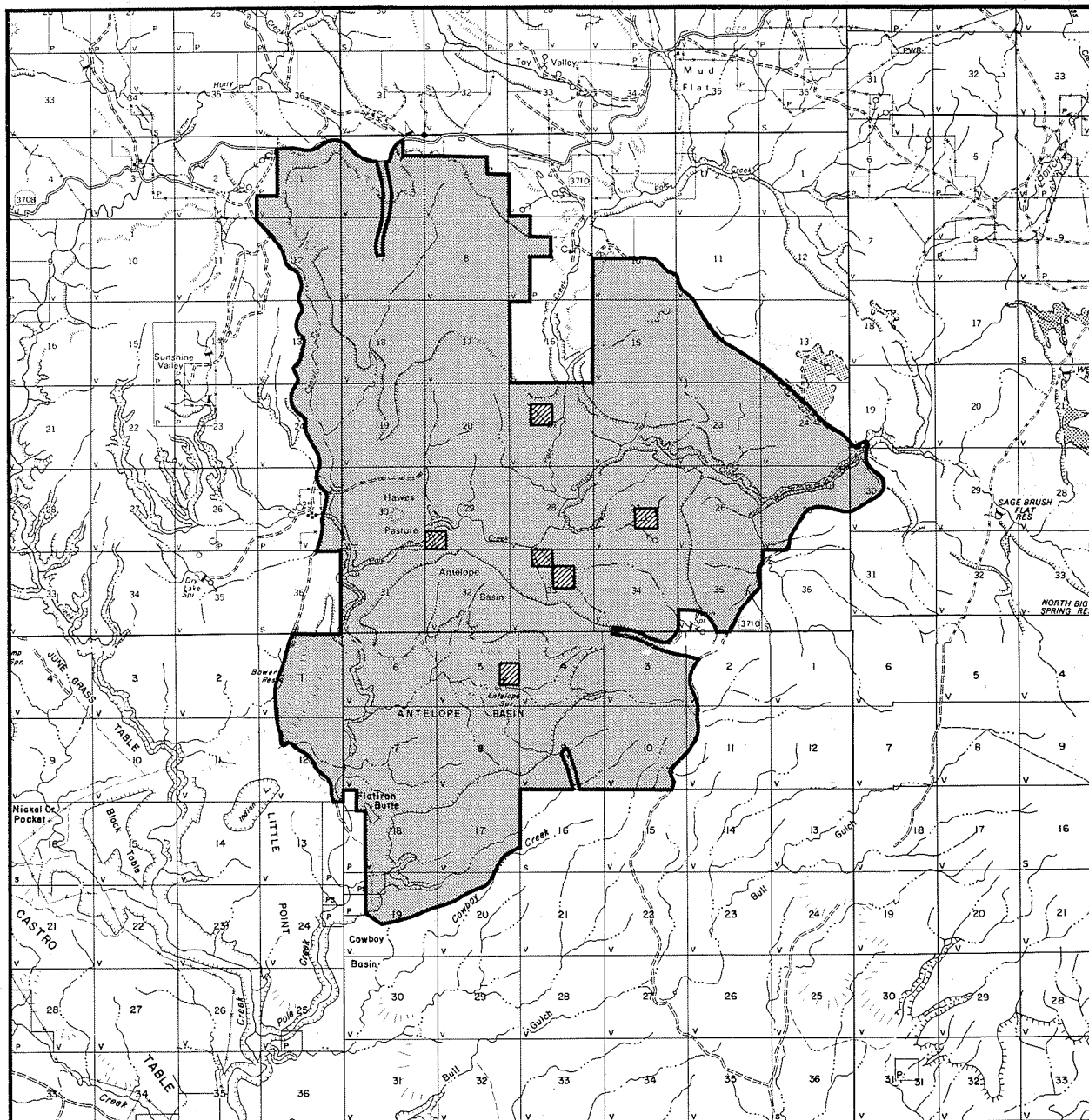
**24,509 acres recommended for
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Pole Creek WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and to release the entire WSA (24,509 acres) for nonwilderness uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts. The area is shown on the Pole Creek Proposal map.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.







BLM is currently implementing more intensive grazing management systems within the WSA. The systems include such practices as deferred grazing, rest rotation, riparian habitat protection and adjustments in season of use. Resulting improvement in ecological condition and increases in available livestock forage would allow a 47 percent increase (1,172 AUM) in livestock grazing over current use in 20 years. Wilderness designation would limit grazing use to that occurring at the time of designation.

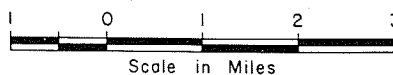
There is a proposal to improve the road along the eastern boundary of the WSA. Road upgrading would cause increased recreation use, especially during hunting season. Due to the lack of topographic and vegetative barriers, it would be very difficult to prevent motor vehicles from leaving the road and going into the area if designated as wilderness.



R. 3 W. | R. 2 W.

R. 2 W. | R. 1 W.

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |  | STATE |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE |



ID-111-18
POLE CREEK
PROPOSAL

FEBRUARY 1989

T. 9 S.
T. 10 S.

T. 10 S.

T. 11 S.

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
POLE CREEK WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	24,509
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	240
Total	24,749

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	24,509
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	24,509
Inholdings (state, private)	240

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Pole Creek WSA consists of hills and plateaus dissected by canyons. The WSA is predominantly natural but there are several site-specific signs of man that impact the area including 2.5 miles of cherry-stem roads, four miles of primitive vehicle routes (ways) and two small livestock water developments.

B. Solitude

Opportunities for solitude are outstanding in the western and northern part of the WSA because of its size, vegetation and landforms. The best opportunities for solitude are found along the meandering Camas and Pole Creeks. Views up and down the canyons are usually less than .25 mile. Riparian vegetation in the canyon floors and juniper stands on the canyon slopes provide additional visual screening.

Opportunities for solitude are also outstanding in Wagon Box Basin and in the juniper-covered hills north of Pole Creek. In these areas, the combination of topographic relief and dense stands of juniper provides effective visual and auditory screening between visitor groups.

Only scattered juniper grows in Antelope Basin and on the southern plateaus of the WSA. Opportunities for solitude are less than outstanding in these areas because of the lack of topographic relief and vegetative screening.

Low elevation flights by military aircraft occasionally disrupt opportunities for solitude throughout the WSA. The entire southwest corner of Idaho is used for training military pilots in subsonic low elevation flight. Disruptions are usually brief, although occasionally aircraft can be seen or heard throughout the day.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Although the Pole Creek WSA has some outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation, they are of lower quality when compared to other WSAs in southwestern Idaho.

The major recreational attraction of the area is its wealth of archaeological sites. While many of the 150 sites are composed of relatively obscure surface scattering of tools and chipping debris, others are fascinating examples of prehistoric rock art. Basalt hunting blinds and rock walls line the canyon rims. Prehistoric artists have etched images of bighorn sheep and geometric designs into basalt walls lining Camas Creek. Eleven separate rock art locations have been found with several containing numerous individual panels.

D. Special Features

Because of its archaeological wealth, about 35 percent of the Pole Creek WSA is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Pole Creek/Camas Creek Archaeological District. There are more than 150 prehistoric archaeological sites in the WSA including habitation sites, caves, hunting blinds, rock alignments and numerous petroglyphs. The density of sites indicates this remote desert area was once bustling with activity. Archaeological research suggests this area has been occupied for 6,000 to 7,000 years. This area has excellent potential for studying prehistoric settlement patterns and intercultural relationships. Intensive scientific archaeological investigations have been conducted in the area since 1975 including four archaeological "digs."

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of the Pole Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System; however, it would add a landform and vegetative type not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. About 55 percent of the WSA's vegetation is in poor ecological with less than three percent in good ecological condition. Because of the generally poor ecological condition of the vegetation, this WSA is not a good representation of the pre-settlement sagebrush steppe ecosystem. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2

Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
		<u>NATIONWIDE</u>		
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
		<u>IDAHO</u>		
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
		<u>NEVADA</u>		
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
		<u>CALIFORNIA</u>		
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
		<u>OREGON</u>		
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Pole Creek WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

Table 3
**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>	<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16 4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Pole Creek WSA would add to the geographical distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon and plateau area not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

Manageability

The entire WSA could effectively be managed as wilderness only if private inholdings were acquired on the parcels which would compromise wilderness characteristics.

There are six 40 acre private inholdings scattered throughout the central core of the WSA. This central portion of the WSA has little topographic or vegetative screening. It is characterized by broad, open basins with long sweeping views. The private inholdings are located in these basins and are visible from much of the WSA. Nonconforming uses on these private inholdings could compromise naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in much of the WSA. Providing motorized vehicle access to the inholdings would also impact naturalness and eliminate opportunities for solitude in much of the central part of the WSA. In this type of open terrain and with the distribution of private parcels, BLM cannot be sure that this area can be effectively managed in the long term to maintain its wilderness characteristics unless the inholdings were acquired.

There is a proposal to improve the road along the eastern boundary of the WSA to service a mining operation to the south. If this road is upgraded, recreation use along it would greatly increase and it would be difficult to prevent unauthorized motor vehicle travel into the area if designated as wilderness due to the lack of topographic and vegetative barriers.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

An assessment of the mineral potential was done under the Geology, Mineral and Energy contract. There are no known mineral or energy resources in the WSA and the geology is not favorable for the discovery of significant marketable energy or mineral resources. There are no known mining claims or mineral leases within the WSA.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4

**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative
WSA ID-111-18 (POLE CREEK)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	(24,509 acres) Naturalness would be lost and opportunities for primitive recreation would be diminished on 4,400 acres. There would be increased livestock trampling of archaeological sites in the Pole Creek/Camas Creek Archaeological District.	(24,509 acres) Naturalness and opportunities for solitude/primitive recreation would be enhanced on about 85 acres affected by road closures. Ongoing archaeological research and site stabilization would become more costly and could be limited.
Impacts on Recreation Use	Annual recreation use would be about 550 visitor days, an increase of 225 annual visitor days over current use. Opportunities to participate in off-road vehicle use or hunting would not be affected.	Annual recreation use would be about 475 visitor days, an increase of 150 visitor days over current use. Some sage grouse hunters could be displaced. There would be no significant impact on opportunities to participate in ORV use.
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Species	Mule deer would increase up to 5%. Pronghorn would increase up to 5%. Sage grouse would increase up to 10%.	Mule deer would increase up to 5%. Pronghorn would increase up to 5%. Sage grouse would increase up to 10%.
Impacts on Income and Jobs	There would be \$21,793 of additional annual income and .8 new jobs. Implementation costs would total \$11,000 for range improvements.	There would be \$8,124 of additional annual income and .5 new jobs. Implementation costs would total \$4,400 annually for wilderness management.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Nondesignation or designation of the entire Pole Creek WSA or any portion of the WSA as wilderness would have no significant social or economic effects on Owyhee County.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During the wilderness inventory for the Pole Creek roadless unit, 14 public commenters supported the establishment of a WSA and two opposed it. Reasons cited among those who supported the establishment of a WSA were the area's archeological sites (five comments), exceptional scenery (four comments), and wildlife values (three comments). Those who opposed designation of the WSA cited the lack of outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation.

During the public review of the Bruneau MFP, all 25 comments supported wilderness designation. Comments suggested that BLM had overstated wilderness manageability problems and that the area's archaeological values warranted wilderness designation.

During the public review of the Draft Jacks Creek Wilderness EIS, 151 written and oral comments addressing this WSA were received. Public hearings were held in Boise and Grand View, Idaho. Seventy-seven commenters supported wilderness designation for all of the WSA, 48 commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA, while 26 commenters took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Among those supporting wilderness, 80 percent were Idaho residents with a majority from Ada County; 12 percent were from other western states; and eight percent were residents of eastern states. The most prevalent reasons cited for wilderness designation were preservation of cultural values and wildlife habitat. Other reasons supporting wilderness were to provide primitive recreation opportunities and solitude; to preserve scenic quality; the proximity to Boise, Idaho; and to maximize protection of riparian habitat. Twelve wilderness supporters pointed out that wilderness designation would have minimal resource conflicts with other resource uses.

About 85 percent of the comments opposing wilderness designation were from local residents with about 40 percent from Owyhee County, 35 percent from Ada County, and ten percent from Canyon and Elmore Counties. The remaining 15 percent were from residents of other western states. Twenty-two of these commenters believe that wilderness designation would discriminate against senior citizens and the handicapped. Other reasons for opposing wilderness were wilderness is not effective management (too inflexible and costly); wilderness is not multiple use; Idaho has enough wilderness; wilderness values do not need wilderness designation for protection; wilderness would close the door to future oil and gas exploration work.

Several agencies commented on the Draft EIS. The Department of the Air Force and supported wilderness designation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the Owyhee County Commissioners supported no wilderness designation. The Federal Aviation Agency, Environmental Protection Agency and the Idaho State Historical Society commented on the DEIS but did not express an alternative preference.